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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, April 21, 2010

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Recovery Act Funds Put Aiken Technical College Rad Con Graduates to Work Early

Aiken, S.C. – Using \$200,000 in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds from the U.S. Department of Energy's Savannah River Site (SRS), the Aiken Technical College's (ATC) Radiation Protection Technology Program will be able to catapult 16 graduates into the local work force nearly six months ahead of schedule.

"The program's first graduates are a success story that has come to life in a short period of time," said Chuck Radford, a health physicist with the U.S. Department of Energy-Savannah River.

"By accelerating coursework and ultimately the graduation date, the Savannah River Site and Aiken Technical College are addressing a dire need for radiation protection technicians.

Recovery Act funding was instrumental in training these students to work on important cleanup projects at the Site and in other locations around the country that are also experiencing shortages of properly trained technicians."

Recovery Act funding was used in part to hire two additional adjunct professors, bringing the total number to six. These extra staff members enabled the program to offer additional labs and classes in a shortened mini-semester format, accelerating students' graduation dates.

14 of the 16 graduating students will work at SRS on Recovery Act projects. The final two students plan to work toward a bachelor's degree at one of three partnering universities in South Carolina (University of South Carolina, South Carolina State University and Francis Marion University).

Scottie Lard, one of the 16 graduates, said the accelerated program has helped him out during the tough economy. "When I started, my goal was to get through the program as quickly as possible while still getting the knowledge I needed to get into the field," he said. "Recovery Act funding helped me to meet that goal."

Another graduate, Shane Thomas, added: "It's been great to have the adjunct faculty. Without

them, we would not been able to go through the program at the accelerated pace.”

In addition to the current graduates, the program has accelerated the graduation date of another 40-50 students, who are scheduled to complete the program in the next year.

The nuclear industry has experienced a decrease in younger workers and faces a nationwide shortage of trained technicians, so programs like the partnership between Aiken Technical College and the Savannah River Site are a much-needed boost to the profession.

“There are not enough radiation technicians in the country to cover the Recovery Act work going on now, and at the same time, there will be the need for hundreds of technicians in the next five years,” explained Jim Stafford, the director of SRNS’ Radiological Protection Department and the chair of the ATC Radiation Protection Program Advisory Board. “Programs like the one at Aiken Technical College are helping to fill that demand. Not all of the opportunities will be local, but there is professional opportunity throughout the region and throughout the country.”

The ATC program is the largest of about a dozen radiation protection technology programs in the nation and more than twice the size of the next largest program. It started in August 2008 and now has 163 registered students. A second group of 15 students benefiting from the extra classes and instructors funded by the Recovery Act will graduate on May 6.

Additional information on the Department of Energy’s Office of Environmental Management and the Savannah River Site, can be found at <http://www.em.doe.gov> or <http://www.srs.gov>. For more information about the SRS Recovery Act Project, please visit www.srs.gov/recovery.

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SR-2010-16